



The Devil's Own

A Romance of the Black Hawk War

By Randall Parrish

Author of "Contraband," "Shea of the Irish Brigade," "When Wilderness was King," etc.

Illustrated by Edwin Meyer

CHAPTER VI—Continued.

"I had but one immediate purpose in my mind—to escape from the house as quickly as possible, to attain Pete's cart at the edge of the woods, and be several miles up the river, hidden away in some covert before daylight, leaving no trail behind. It would prove decidedly to our advantage if I was not seen or recognized. The very mystery, the bewilderment as to who had so viciously attacked the gambler and then spirited away the girl, would serve to facilitate our escape.

I stooped and removed a pistol from Kirby's pocket, dropping it, together with such ammunition as I could find, into one of my own. The man by this time was breathing heavily, although his eyes remained closed, and he still lay exactly as he had fallen.

"Keep your own weapon," I commanded her. "Hide it away in your dress. Now come with me."

She obeyed, uttering no word of objection, and stepping after me through the open window onto the narrow balcony without. I reached up and drew down the shade, leaving us in comparative darkness. The night was soundless and our eyes, straining to pierce the black void, were unable to detect any movement.

"You see nothing?" I whispered, touching her hand in encouragement. "No evidence of a guard anywhere?"

"No—the others must still be out in front waiting."

"There were only the four of them, then?"

"So I understood. I was told they came up the river in a small keelboat, operated by an engine, and that they anticipated no resistance. The engineer was left to watch the boat and be ready to depart downstream at any moment."

"Good; that leaves us a clear passage. Now I am going to drop to the ground; it is not far below. Can you make it alone?"

"I have done so many a time."

We attained the solid earth almost together and in silence.

"Now let me guide you," she suggested, as I hesitated. "I know every inch of the way about here. Where is the negro waiting?"

"At the edge of the wood where the wagon road ends, beyond the slave quarters."

"Yes, I know; it will be safer for us to go around the garden."

She flitted forward, sure-footed, confident, and I followed as rapidly as possible through the darkness, barely keeping her dim figure in sight. Our feet stumbled over the ruts of a road, and I seemed to vaguely recognize the spot as familiar. Yes, away off yonder was the distant gleam of the river reflecting the stars. This must be the very place where Pete and I had parted, but—where had the fellow gone?

"Here is where he was directed to wait," I explained hurriedly. "I am sure I am not mistaken in the spot."

"Yet he is not here, and there is no sign of him. You left no other instructions except for him to remain until your return?"

"I think not—oh, yes, I did tell him if you women came without me he was to drive you at once to the boat and leave me to follow the best way I could. Do you suppose it possible the others reached here and he has gone away with them?"

She stood silent and I strove by peering about to discover some marks of guidance, only to learn the uselessness of the effort. Even a slight advance brought no result, and it was with some difficulty I even succeeded in locating her again in the darkness—indeed, only the sound of her voice made me aware of her immediate presence.

"The negro's boat is some distance away, is it not?"

"Four miles, over the worst road I ever traveled." A sudden remembrance swept into my mind, bringing with it inspiration.

"Have you ever visited the mouth of Saunders' creek? You have! How far away is that from here?"

"Not more than half a mile; it enters the river just below the Landing."

"And, if I understood you rightly," I urged eagerly, "you said that these fellows left their keelboat there; that it had been rigged up to run by steam, and had no guard aboard except the engineer; you are sure of this?"

"That was what the man who talked to me first said—the deputy sheriff. He boasted that they had the only keelboat on the river equipped with an engine and had come up from St. Louis in two hours. You—you think we could use that?"

"It seems to be all that is left us. I intend to make the effort, anyway. You had better show me the road."

I followed her closely, a mere shadow, as she silently led the way along the edge of the wood and back of the negro quarters. I felt confident of being able safely to approach the unsuspecting engineer and overcome any resistance before he could realize the possibility of attack. I was obliged to rely upon a guess at the time of night, yet surely it could not be long after twelve and there must remain hours of darkness amply sufficient for our purpose. With the boat once securely in our possession the engineer compelled to serve, for I had no skill in that line, we could strike out directly for the opposite shore and

creep along in its shadows past the sleeping town at the Landing until we attained the deserted waters above. By then we should practically be beyond immediate pursuit. Even if Carver or the sheriff discovered Kirby, any immediate chase by river would be impossible. Nothing was available for their use except a few rowboats at the Landing; they would know nothing as to whether we had gone up or down stream, while the coming of the early daylight would surely permit us to discover some place of concealment along the desolate Illinois shore. Desperate as the attempt undoubtedly was the situation as I considered it in all its details brought me faith in our success and fresh encouragement to make the effort.

We moved forward slowly. I took the lead myself, bending low and feeling carefully for footing in the wiry grass. The darkness so shrouded everything, blending objects into shapeless shadows, that it required several moments before I could clearly determine the exact details. The mouth of the creek, a good-sized stream, was only a few yards away, and the boat, rather a larger craft than I had anticipated seeing, lay just off shore, with stern to the bank, as though prepared for instant departure. It was securely held in position by a rope, probably looped about a convenient



His Mouth Hung Open and His Eyes Stared at Me.

stump, and my eyes were finally able to trace the outlines of the wheel by which it was propelled. Except for straggling rushes extending to the edge of the water, the space between was vacant yet sufficiently mantled in darkness to enable one to creep forward unseen.

At first glance I could distinguish no sign of the boatman left in charge, but even as I lay there, breathless and uncertain, he suddenly revealed his presence by lighting a lantern in the stern. The illumination was feeble enough yet sufficient to expose to view the small, unprotected engine aft, and also the fact that all forward of the little cockpit in which it stood the entire craft was decked over. The fellow was busily engaged in overhauling the machinery, leaning far forward, his body indistinct, the lantern swinging in one hand, with entire attention devoted to his task. Occasionally, as he lifted his head for some purpose, the dim radiance fell upon his face, revealing the unmistakable countenance of a mulatto, a fellow of medium size, broad of cheek, with unusually full lips and a fringe of whisker turning gray. Somehow this revelation that he was a negro and not a white man brought with it to me an additional confidence in success. I inclined my head and whispered in the girl's ear:

"You are not to move from here until I call. This is to be my part of the work, handling that lad. I am going now."

"He is colored, is he not—a slave?" "We can only guess as to that. But he does not look to me like a hard proposition. If I can only reach the boat without being seen the rest will be easy. Now is the proper time, while he is busy tinkering with the engine. You will stay here?"

"Yes, of course; I—I could be of no help."

She suddenly held out her hand, as though impelled to the action by some swift impulse, and the warm pressure of her fingers meant more than words. I could not see the expression on her face, yet knew the slender body was trembling nervously.

"Surely you are not afraid?"

"Oh, no; it is not that—I am all unstrung. You must not think of me at all."

I realized the gravity of my task, and my eyes were watchful of the shrouded figure I was silently approaching. I drew nearer inch by inch, advancing so slowly and snake-like that not even the slightest sound of movement aroused suspicion. Apparently the fellow was engaged in oiling the machinery, for he had placed the lantern on deck and held a long-spouted can in his fingers. His back remained toward me as I drew near the stern, and consequently I no longer had a glimpse of his face. The wooden wheel of the boat, a clumsy-looking apparatus, rested almost directly against the bank, where

the water was evidently deep enough to float the vessel, and the single rope holding it in position was drawn taut from the pressure of the current. Waiting until the man was compelled to bend lower over his work, utterly unconscious of my presence, I straightened up and, pistol in hand, stepped upon the wooden beam supporting the wheel. He must have heard this movement, for he lifted his head quickly, yet was even then too late; already I had gained the afterdeck and my weapon was on a level with his eyes.

"Don't move or cry out!" I commanded sternly. "Obey orders and you will not be hurt."

He shrank away, sinking upon the bench, his face upturned so that the light fell full upon it, for the instant too greatly surprised and frightened to give utterance to a sound. His mouth hung open, and his eyes stared at me.

"Who—who was you? What was your name?"

"I am asking questions and you are answering them. Are you armed? All right, then; hand it over. Now put out that light."

He did exactly as I told him, moving as though paralyzed by fear, yet unable to resist.

"You are a negro—a slave?"

"Yes, sah; Ah's Massa Donaldson's boy from St. Louis."

"He is the sheriff?"

"Yes, sah—yes, sah. What is Massa Donaldson? Yer ain't done bin sent yere by him, I reckon. 'Pears like I never see yer afore."

"No; but he is quite safe. What is your name?"

"Sam, sah—just plain Sam."

"Well, Sam, I understand you are an engineer. Now, it happens that I want to use this boat, and you are going to run it for me, do you understand? I am going to sit down here on the edge of this cockpit and hold this loaded pistol just back of your ear. It might go off at any minute, and surely will if you make a false move or attempt to foul the engine. Any trick, and there is going to be a dead nigger overboard. I know enough about engines to tell if you play fair—so don't take any chances, boy."

"Ah—Ah—reckon as how I was goin' fer ter run her all right, sah; she's sum' considerable contrary at times, sah, but Ah'll surely run her, if that's eny run in her, sah. Ah ain't carin' 'bout bel'n' no corpse."

"I thought not; you'd rather be a free nigger, perhaps? Well, Sam, if you will do this job all right for me tonight I'll put you where the sheriff will never see hide nor hair of you again—no, not yet; wait a moment, there is another passenger."

She came instantly in answer to my low call, and through the gloom the startled negro watched her descend the bank, a mere moving shadow, yet with the outlines of a woman. I half believe he thought her a ghost, for I could hear him muttering inarticulately to himself. I dared not remove my eyes from the fellow, afraid that his very excess of fear might impel him to some reckless act, but I extended one hand across the side of the boat to her assistance.

"Take my hand, Rene," I said pleasantly, to reassure her, "and come aboard. Yes, everything is all right. I've just promised Sam here a ticket for Canada."

I helped her across into the cockpit and seated her on the bench, but never venturing to remove my eyes from the negro. His actions and whatever I was able to observe of the expression of his face only served to convince me of his trustworthiness, yet I could take no chances.

"She's just a real, live woman, sah?" he managed to ejaculate, half in doubt. "She sure ain't no ghost, sah?"

"By no means, Sam; she is just as real as either you or I. Now listen, boy—you know what will happen to you after this, if Donaldson ever gets hold of you?"

"I 'spects I does, sah. He'd just nat'arily skin dis nigger alive, Ah reckon."

"Very well, then; it is up to you to get away, and I take it that you understand this river. We are going to head upstream."

"Yes, sir; yer plannin' fer ter go nor." Wal, sah, dars plenty o' watah fer dis yere boat right now, wid de spring floods. Nothin' fer ter be afere'd o' 'bout dat."

"That is good news. Now, Sam, I am going to cut this line, and I want you to steer straight across into the shadows of the Illinois shore. I believe you are going to play square, but for the present I'm going to take no chances with you. I am holding this pistol within a foot of your head, and your life means nothing to me if you try any trick. What is the speed of this boat upstream?"

"'Bout ten mile an hour, sah."

"Well, don't push her too hard at first, and run that engine as noiselessly as possible. Are you ready? Yes—then I'll cut loose."

I severed the line and we began to recede from the shore, cutting diagonally across the decidedly swift current. Once beyond the protection of the point the star-cream revealed the sturdy rush of the waters, occasionally flecked with bubbles of foam. Sam handled the unwieldy craft with the skill of a practiced boatman, and the laboring engine made far less racket than I had anticipated. Pistol in hand, and vigilant to every motion of the negro, my eyes swept along that vague shore line, catching nowhere a spark of light, nor any evidence that the steady chug of our engine had created alarm. We were alone upon the mysterious bosom of the vast stream, tossed about in the full sweep of the current, yet moving steadily forward, and already safely beyond both sight and sound.

Every moment of progress tended to increase my confidence in Sam's loyalty.

The fellow plainly enough realized the situation—that safety for himself depended on keeping beyond the reach of his master. To this end he devoted every instant diligently to coaxing his engine and a skillful guidance of the boat, never once permitting his head to turn far enough to glance at me, although I could occasionally detect his eyes wandering in the direction of the girl.

She had not uttered a word nor changed her posture since first entering the boat, but remained just as I had seated her, one hand grasping the edge of the cockpit, her gaze on the rushing waters ahead. I could realize something of what must be passing through her mind—the mingling of doubt and fear which assailed her in this strange environment. Up until now she had been accorded no opportunity to think, to consider the nature of her position; she had been compelled to act wholly upon impulse and driven blindly to accept my suggestions. And now, in this silence, the reaction had come, and she was already questioning if she had done right.

(To be Continued.)

—Private Edward Southern, truck driver of an army machine was killed and six other persons were seriously injured Sunday in a collision between a street car and the army truck on the outskirts of Washington near Walter Reed hospital.

—Elimination of typesetting, one of the costliest operations of magazine production, by the use of plates made by photographing the original type-written copy has been accomplished in the October 18 issue of the Literary Digest, consisting of 80 pages. This radical innovation which was brought about by the printers' strike in New York, leads the publishers to suggest that "it is possible in this age of marvels that the whole future of magazine production may be revolutionized by the elimination of typesetting. The makeup of the magazine is in no way

changed, the only difference being that the style of type is that used on typewriters and is uniform in all the reading matter through the number. The right hand side of each column is irregular as in ordinary typewritten copy. Each page is in effect a photographic copy of the original article as written on the typewriter.

—General von Der Goltz is reported to have resigned the command of the German army menacing Riga. It is reported that the Germans are using poison gas in the attack on Riga.

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